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A LETTER TO A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, ON THE PRESENT HIGH PRICE OF PROVISIONS.

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A SKETCH OF A PLAN FOR REDUCING THE Preſent High Price of Corn AND OTHER PROVISIONS, AND FOR Securing PLENTY of Both FOR THE TIME TO COME.

In a LETTER to A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT.

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A

LETTER

TO A

Member of Parliament.

SIR,

IT was, I believe, the general hope and expectation, that, by this time, my fellow-citizens might have been felicitated on their relief from that preſſure of dearth and ſcarcity, under which they have frequently groaned for ſeveral years

paſt; and which, but for the vigilance and ſeaſonable interpoſition of the legiſlative power, would have been quite inſupportable. But tho' the time is fully come when we might have ſeen the completion of our wiſhes, in the reduction of the price of every ſpecies of Proviſion, the article of Corn more eſpecially, this pleaſing hope has hitherto proved deluſive, the general wiſh is ſtill unaccompliſhed, and the expectation even of moderate plenty, if not totally abortive, ſeems likely to be protracted, to the injury, and great diſcouragement of our manufactures, conſequently to the conſumption of them--and ultimately to the inconvenience of government itſelf, from a deficiency in the revenue ariſing from thoſe branches of trade which are moſt immediately affected.

For

For notwithſtanding the many favorable appearances, and the flattering accounts with which we have been amuſed for ſeveral years paſt, the preſent ſtate of the Corn-markets does but too plainly ſhew that the event is in no degree anſwerable to theſe kindly prognoſtics.

How then are we to hope for moderate plenty? where are we to ſeek relief?—We are to hope for plenty, at leaſt for the prevention of want—we are to ſeek for preſent relief, and (as far as human prudence can ſuggeſt) for the means of future ſecurity, from the wiſdom and attentive care of parliament; which I truſt will be employed in getting the beſt information from impartial and diſintereſted perſons; and thereupon found ſuch meaſures,

as may beſt promote the general good of this country. And here, Sir, by the bye, I avoid making uſe of a too-common mode of expreſſion; viz. Landed and commercial *Intereſts*---becauſe I cannot view theſe disjunctively---but I conſider them as concomitant branches of the general intereſt, neither of which ought to be cramped in complaiſance to the other, becauſe ſuch complaiſance will eventually operate to the deſtruction of both.

I ſhall here be aſked what meaſures can be deviſed which may ſo operate, as to promote each branch of the general intereſt in conjunction, without a riſque of ſuch claſhing as may poſſibly endanger both the one and the other alternately?

With

With an intention to anſwer this queſtion, rather than employ myſelf merely in inveſtigating the cauſes of the high Price of Proviſions, as ſeveral writers have ineffectively done, I have thrown together ſome hints, which I intended for a Treatiſe on this ſubject; but not having leiſure to expatiate on them agreeable to my firſt intention, I ſhall therefore preſent them to you in their original ſimplicity; with only a few of the moſt ſtriking obſervations and inferences, and leave it to your better judgment to enlarge upon them. heads of

In general, high prices, both of Corn and other Proviſions, proceed, in great meaſure, from the ſame cauſes---are highly influential on each other---therefore the ſame remedies

medies will probably cure both.--- But ſome of theſe cauſes are out of the reach of human prudence to prevent, being entirely providential: and theſe cauſes I conſider as the moſt effective to produce the ſcarcity and dearneſs ſo univerſally lamented.

For inſtance, Unkindly ſeaſons have ſeveral times, within a few years paſt, occaſioned ſcarcity of Corn of all ſorts---Unexpected floods have alſo rotted and drowned great numbers of ſheep. Such cauſes of ſcarcity as theſe cannot be prevented by any human preſcience--- Their effects may, nevertheleſs, be conſiderably alleviated by human prudence.

There

There are likewiſe other cauſes which ariſe out of the circumſtances of the times,--as,

1ſt, The increaſe of monied property among us. This cauſe, though it muſt be conſidered as an increaſe of national ſtrength, is certainly productive of internal partial poverty for a ſeaſon: Becauſe it neceſſarily occaſions a proportionable decreaſe of the ſpecific value of mony.--For,

2dly, The neceſſity our manufacturers are under of making goods for foreign markets as cheap as the manufacturers in other countries, where mony is not ſo plenty, conſtrains them to give low wages to the laborers they employ in the ſeveral branches of manufacture: But low wages will not maintain

thoſe

thoſe laborers in dear times---Hence ariſes a continual altercation between merchants, manufacturers, and laborers---The conſequences of which are, debaſement of the ſtaple and workmanſhip, and depreciation at foreign markets---Hence a ſtagnation of trade; the reſult of which, it is very obvious, muſt be very injurious to (I had almoſt ſaid the deſtruction of) every branch of the common intereſt---This principally concerns the article of bread-corn, and houſhold Proviſions.

I would in the next place obſerve, that the manufacturers of Corn for home conſumption, eſpecially the two great branches (brewery and diſtillery), are influenced in like manner---for if the prices of grain

be

be enormous, maltſter, brewer, and diſtiller, are alike diſcouraged; and it may reaſonably be feared that the manufactures will be debaſed, conſumption leſſened, and government ſuffer by loſs of revenue.

Seeing then that, by the increaſe of money, the price of every article of family expence is unavoidably enhanced, every attempt to reduce the prices to ſuch as were known twenty or thirty years ago, would be vain and futile. For although every article be not advanced in the ſame degree, yet ſomething approaching very near to equality will eaſily be diſcovered by every attentive obſerver. Nor can any meaſure be deviſed for ſtopping the progreſs of dearneſs, I do not ſay ſcarcity (for this cauſe alone will

occaſion dearth, without the aid of ſcarcity) except a total ſuppreſſion of every branch of foreign commerce where the balance is in favor of Great Britain--an idea which ſurely cannot find harbor in the breaſt of any man.

Senſible and practicable remedies muſt therefore be ſought for till found---expedients which will ſo comport with our commercial intereſt as at once to ſupport the landed intereſt, by enabling farmers, laborers, manufacturers and merchants to accommodate themſelves to the times, ſince the times will not bend to their convenience.

Now, Sir, as my declared intention is, rather to ſuggeſt ſuch remedies than to tread the beaten tract

of clamor and complaint, I will beg leave to point out ſome ſuch meaſures as ſeem beſt to promiſe redreſs of thoſe clamors and complaints---And firſt with reſpect to Corn. Suppoſe, by parliamentary interpoſition, ſuch a modus of bounty on exportation ſhould be eſtabliſhed as may at once encourage the growth, and preſerve mediocrity of Prices. The utility of ſuch a modus is to me very obvious; and I own I do not ſee any impediments to the practicability of it: which I hope will ſtrike yourſelf, and every member of the houſe of commons, in the ſame way, on a few minutes reflexion.---For I would propoſe, Sir, that the preſent fixed bounty of five ſhillings *per* quarter on exportation, which I think by far too indefinite, and therefore inadequate to the preſent ſtate of things,

ſhould be, by authority of Parliament, entirely abrogated---And, inſtead thereof, another modus of bounty ſhall be eſtabliſhed which will operate as a counterpoize to the prices. For inſtance---the following table is preſented to you, which will better illuſtrate my meaning, and ſhew, in a more conciſe view, the propriety of ſuch a plan than a prolix and labored explanation.

Wheat under 30 *s. per* Quarter to receive Bounty 8 *s. per* Quarter.

from 30 *s.* to 32 *s.*	6 *s.*
from 32 *s.* to 36 *s.*	4 *s.*
from 36 *s.* to 40 *s.*	2 *s.*
from 40 *s.* to 44 *s.*	No Bounty.
when above 44 *s.*	No Exportation.
at or above 48 *s.*	Free Importation.

So likewise,

Barley under 15 *s. per* Quarter to receive Bounty 4 *s. per* Quarter.

from 15 *s.* to 16 *s.*	3 *s.*
from 16 *s.* to 18 *s.*	1 *s.* 6 *d.*
from 18 *s.* to 19 *s.*	1 *s.*
from 19 *s.* to 21 *s.*	No Bounty.
above 21 *s.*	No Exportation.
at or above 23 *s.*	Free Importation.

Thus,

Thus, when Corn is cheap, the farmer will be encouraged to ſell, and will be largely compenſated out of the public ſtock---for the reſt, his plentiful crop, (the cauſe of cheapneſs) may reaſonably be preſumed ſufficient compenſation.----*E contra* ---when the price of Corn ſhall grow dearer, enormous prices may be prevented, by endeavoring to keep it at home; inſomuch that the manufacturer will be relieved from the fears of loſing by his manufactures, and from the temptation of debaſing the quality of them; the merchant may export goods to foreign markets, on as good terms *at leaſt* as our rivals in commerce, and the laborer be freed from every probable danger of diſtreſs. Eſpecially,

If,

If, in aid of this plan, ſome other ſalutary proviſions be made by parliament, for encouraging the produce and elevation of cattle, ſheep, and the ſmaller articles of ſuſtentation; as pigs, geeſe, poultry, &c. Theſe ſmaller articles having been greatly diſcouraged by two ſorts of improvement, lately become very much in vogue among us; viz. the conſolidating ſmall farms into large ones, and incloſing commons---a word or two on each of theſe heads with your leave.

1ſt, The uniting ſeveral ſmall farms in order to compoſe very large ones, though by many conſidered in the light of an improvement, has conduced not a little to enhance the price of Proviſions---becauſe although (as the owners of ſuch lands contend)

contend) there ſhould be hopes of a more plentiful produce of *Corn*, by the occupiers of ſuch farms, than by farmers of lower rank and ability (which by the way is *gratis dictum*) yet the production of all the ſpecies of leſſer Proviſions, uſually raiſed by ſmall farmers; viz. pigs, geeſe, poultry, eggs, and butter, is in great meaſure, if not totally neglected by the great farmers; whoſe attention being engroſſed by their grand object, Corn, either have not leiſure to advert to theſe ſmaller matters, or elſe conſider them as of little or no importance to themſelves. Hence ariſes a ſcarcity of theſe ſmaller articles—and a great ſcarcity of any one ſort will undoubtedly affect the price of every other ſort.—It muſt however, be confeſſed, that *very* ſmall farms do not ſeem calculated to produce

any

any thing else beside the smaller articles.

Both these extremes, I think, may be easily shewn to be injurious to commerce and to the perfection of Agriculture---and consequently to the landed interest. But a reform in these points is not perhaps an object of parliamentary concern; but only of personal prudence in the land-owners. These gentlemen would therefore, do well to consider, what evils have already arisen from this practice---what farther and still greater may arise---and where they will terminate.

2d. The inclosing large tracts of commonable land---Though this may produce good effects in future, seems for the present to operate in a quite

contrary way, for want of ſome reſtrictions and limitations, in the acts of parliament paſſed for that purpoſe. For if, as one may fairly ſuppoſe, the lands in the vicinity of any city, or manufacturing town, were formerly deſtined and occupied, ſo as to produce the ſeveral ſpecies of ſuſtenance chiefly in requeſt for the ſupport of the inhabitants:—Then it follows that the converſion of any conſiderable portion of ſuch land to the production of any thing elſe beſide, muſt for the preſent, occaſion a ſcarcity of ſomething more uſeful and important to that neighborhood. Land, for example, heretofore in paſturage, may be converted to tillage, and *vice verſa*. In either caſe that particular neighborhood may be in ſome degree affected, even in time of moderate plenty, but will probably ſuffer greatly in ſcarce times.

But

But this is not all---this evil is likely to increaſe, and be perpetuated, unleſs the practice of incloſing be reſtrained by ſome cautionary clauſes, to be inſerted in all ſuch-like acts of parliament for the future. I have been credibly informed that, in ſome countries, larger tracts of common field land heretofore in *tillage*, but now by incloſing converted *to paſturage*, do not *at preſent* produce any thing ſerviceable to the neighboring towns: Becauſe the owners of ſuch incloſed commons do not chooſe either to feed ſheep, or ſuckle lambs, on thoſe grounds, for ſome years, in order to gain time for the growth of hedges: By which means the public is deprived of ſome conſiderable quantity of ſuſtenance, without any equivalent at all.

Although the high price of Corn has, of late been the chief object of tumultuous clamor, I cannot, for my own part, conceive that complaints on this head could possibly have arisen to any very inconvenient height, were it not for the concurrence and co-operation of the dearness of every other article of houſhold expence---It ſeems highly expedient, therefore to employ effectual care to ſecure plenty *in general*. Not of Corn only, but of every ſpecies of ſuſtentation whatſoever. One means of which (after having ſufficiently provided for the article of Corn, by ſome ſuch-like modus as has been already ſuggeſted) I think may be, to preſerve a quantity of commonable land in the circuit of towns and villages, for the ſake of producing pigs, geeſe, poultry, eggs, butter, &c.---

&c. This leſſer ſort of produce has heretofore been the cuſtomary attention and employment of cottagers and ſmall farmers: And theſe articles have been greatly diminiſhed, and ſeem in great danger of being intirely loſt to the community, by the preſent mode of incloſing. Moreover the commiſſioners appointed to parcel out and make allotment of ſuch grounds when incloſed, ſhould be expreſsly enjoined to ſecure ſome immediate produce, either of Corn, cattle, or the leſſer articles of Proviſion.

A regulation of this ſort I think will be extremely beneficial—nor can it reaſonably be objected to by the petitioners for ſuch bills. For, in a national view, it appears perfectly right and fit that the proprietors of ſuch lands as are deſirous of

incloſing

incloſing (whoſe motive thereto may be ſuppoſed to be of a private nature) ſhould be limited in ſome degree, and even *cramped* for a ſeaſon, rather than the public good ſhould be ſacrificed to their particular convenience. For unleſs every article of ſuſtentation ſhall be attended to, as well as Corn, a ſcarcity of any one ſort, will undoubtedly influence the price of all the reſt.

A parallel is much to be deſired, between the price of Corn and fleſh meat, as well as between one ſpecies of Corn and another.—As therefore it was thought expedient, formerly to allow a large bounty on exportation of Corn, in order to encourage the produce; why may not the ſame policy be adopted, and applied *(pro re nata)* to the produce of other articles

ticles likewiſe? And this in a way of premium to thoſe who ſhall breed and elevate the greateſt numbers of pigs, geeſe, poultry, &c? Which articles, inconſiderable as they may appear to ſome people, are really of important uſe in every market both in town and country.

Some perſons are of opinion that temporary remedies are all that the preſent exigency requires---If by temporary they intend remedies of ſhort duration, I fear ſuch will be found to be of very uncertain operation alſo, and therefore inadequate to the preſent diſtreſs and the impending danger. But if they mean ſuch remedies as will act gently and with moderation, and which may hereafter be improved; it is very obvious that, unleſs mony ſhall remain at its

its present value, no other but such remedies can possibly be devised. I therefore crave leave to offer to your notice the preceding plan, as, in my apprehension, the most permanent—and the most easy to be modelled and reduced to such proportions as may also suit the next generation. For could the very best plan be immediately adopted, and instituted for a series of years; it is evident, from the foregoing consideration, that the effect of it would soon wear out; and that (unless Great Britain shall hereafter be obliged to carry on a losing trade abroad) some farther alterations will become necessary, in accommodation of succeeding times.

The policy instituted at the close of the last century, has been proved

by experience truly wiſe in its degree, as it was adapted to the *then* exigency of the nation. What then can be more diſcrete than to purſue the ſame policy *now*, with ſuch variation, both in the degree and toward the objects, as may beſt ſuit the ſtate and circumſtances of the preſent day.

The then object of parliamentary care and concern was the produce of Corn, and it was thought neceſſary and proper to allow a bounty on exportation of wheat, till the price ſhould exceed ſix ſhillings *per* buſhel, which Proviſion was indeed highly expedient at a time when agriculture claimed an uncommon degree of vigorous aid and encouragement. In our day, it has been found neceſſary to prohibit the exportation (of wheat eſpecially) ſeve-

ral times within a few years paſt, even before it was ſold for the utmoſt price entitled to bounty. And this, as I conceive becauſe by providential occurrences, to ſay nothing of occaſional artifices, the price of every other article of Proviſion is ſo much increaſed, that every advance of the Corn-market is too ſeverely felt.--- But however deſirable it may ſeem that the price of Proviſions ſhould be kept low, it cannot ſurely be proper to preſs them down too low. Experience has abundantly proved that extreme cheapneſs is equally injurious to the manufacturer and the farmer: Seeing that great multitudes of laborers, will not, in ſuch cheap times, work more days in a week, than will procure them even a ſcanty Proviſion for their ſeveral families, and will waſte the reſt of

their (I should say the public's) time in idleness and debauchery.

I remain,

SIR,

Your most obedient,

Humble Servant,

PAMPHILUS.

their (I should [illegible] public's) time
in idleness and [illegible]nery.

I remain,

SIR,

Your most obedient,

Humble Servant,

PAMPHILUS.